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TALKS ABOUT A FINE ART

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TALKS ABOUT A FINE ART

BY

ELIZABETH GLOVER

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TALKS ABOUT A FINE ART.

I.

"Miss Fitts, I like to see you," said Rosalie, as the dressmaker with careful regard for the "way of the cloth" and the saving of material, laid down her patterns, and smoothed and snipped so swiftly and expertly. "I wish I could do something as nicely as you do that."

"I presume you do many things as well as I do this," said Miss Fitts.

"No," said Rosalie in regretful tone, "I haven't any art. There's a friend of mine," she presently continued, "whose father lost his money. She began at once to make her own dresses and her sisters', and you would be surprised to see how easily and neatly she does it. I just wonder at her. I have tried to do it more than once, and taken a world of pains, and not succeeded half as well, though I worked with all the patience I had."

"I presume your gift is not in that line," said Miss Fitts.

"No, and when I went to cooking-school last winter I had the same experience. Some of the girls could see almost before they were shown, but I had to watch and wait and follow every little direction so carefully in order to get anything right."

"Not everybody can be practical," said Miss Fitts, sententiously.

"Yes, it's so important! Mamma says I have a good will, and that's something; but it would be pleasant to have a little faculty also; especially where success is so necessary."

"Success is just as necessary about other things than food and clothes," said Miss Fitts. "There's music; we can't do without music. I heard you singing like a lark this morning."

A look of pain came upon Rosalie's face. "O Miss Fitts," she said, "you don't know how my great disappointment came in there. I did want to sing; and it seemed as if I *could* do that. I was taking lessons and getting on beautifully; and one day I had a little cold, and in came the doctor and looked at my throat, and said I mustn't practise any more. I may sing by little snatches, you know, but to work at it, to be a real trained, practised singer, that is just forbidden me forever."

"Forever is a long word," said Miss Fitts. "I never heard that the angels are troubled with weak throats."

Rosalie smiled. "But one wants to be something in this world," she said. "There's Irene Hastings; she has such a wonderful talent for painting. She won the first prize at the art school last year, and some of her little pictures have sold for really high prices. She has painted a beautiful frieze around her room. It is lovely!"

"Yes," said Miss Fitts, "I was there working when that was going on."

"Didn't you like it?" said Rosalie. "Didn't you think it was clever?"

"Oh, yes, very clever; but you see, it seemed a little unfortunate for her to be shut in there, working away, on the top of a step-ladder, because her mother was sort of driven just then, between me and a sick boy she had. Once we called Irene down to see her mother's dress tried on, and we tried to get her to advise about the trimming; but we couldn't get her head and her heart down out of the tangle of bulrushes and purple iris round that ceiling. She was so pre-occupied we could not get anything out of her. But that was very natural, of course. Dress trimmings can't be as interesting as art."

"You ought not to have interrupted her," said Rosalie.

"I suppose not. But then her mother was worried about her getting so tired, and glad of a pretext to interrupt her. Art does take one's strength, you know, dear, especially when it's up around the ceiling. Irene used to come down with the backache showing in her looks, and she couldn't eat any dinner, and of course such common things as Jack's new bicycle he was so full of, or the tariff that her father wanted to talk about, didn't interest her very much. How could they, after her being lost so long among the grasses and lilies and butterflies. But I was sorry, too, to have her get fretted by the talk of the rest. It put a kind of damper on the family."

Rosalie looked sober. "I suppose there's a temptation with every talent," she said. "But some," she continued, "though they haven't any special talent can *accomplish* so much. There's Mrs. Morrison, you know. She's such a wonderful housekeeper, and yet she manages half the charities in town, and has such a large visiting acquaintance. That large house of

hers is just immaculate from top to bottom. She has such beautiful supplies in her linen-closets and such stores of canned fruits and jellies in her storeroom. And I'm sure she has the longest calling list of any lady in town, and presides at the most committee-meetings. She seems to neglect nothing."

"No, she neglects nothing," said Miss Fitts slowly, her eyes fixed upon her work.

"Well, then, why are you frowning, Miss Fitts? You have something reserved against her."

"No," said Miss Fitts, "I've got nothing against that good Mrs. Morrison. But I wish you'd forget her, Rosalie, and every other *person*, while I tell you an abstract truth."

"Well, what is your abstract truth?"

"It's this: there are two things that can't be done by sheer force of business ability."

"What things?"

"Mothering children, and being socially delightful."

A mischievous smile shone in Rosalie's eyes.

"What do you call 'mothering,' Miss Fitts?" she said.

"Why, babying, and company-keeping, and story-telling, brooding them day by day to make them happy and good."

"But some children get on very well without it."

"They don't develop *right*. They get a hungry look, no matter what's in the pantry and the storeroom."

"And not everybody can be socially delightful," said Rosalie. "You don't call it a *duty*, do you, Miss Fitts?"

"I call it one's first duty," said Miss Fitts, "to be socially delightful *at home*."

There was a little pause, during which the slight frown upon Miss Fitts's face deepened, and her cheeks flushed. "My dear," she said abruptly, "I think often of the ravages of intemperance."

"What do you mean, Miss Fitts?"

"Why, generally when people talk about the ravages of intemperance they're thinking of drunken men who waste their substance, and make their homes wretched. But often when I've seen a woman come to supper so tired, either with making preserves, or making calls, or leading missionary meetings, that she is ready to weep at a word, or to fly out at the children for screwing about in their chairs, so that a cloud comes over every face, and ill-temper creeps in along with the gloom, then I say to myself, 'Behold the ravages of intemperance!'"

Rosalie could not help smiling at Miss Fitts's tragic expression.

"Oh, you mind too much, Miss Fitts," she said.

"Yes, perhaps I do, dear. Some things hurt me more than others. You see, I haven't got any home of my own, except my room, nor any folks to snub and fret at, except myself. That makes me think more about homes. I go from house to house and find myself getting jealous of the gifts you're enjoying so; jealous of the poetry and painting, and cooking and embroidery, yes, and of the charities, — jealous for the children's sakes, and the husband's. There's an art to be set above all the rest. *That's* the art for you, Rosalie."

"What is it?"

"The art of being lovely at home."

"The art of being lovely at home," said Rosalie. "But of course everybody ought to have that, Miss Fitts."

"But does everybody have it? Own up, now, Rosalie. Where do you not mind being shabby? Where do you do your fretting? Where are you perfectly indifferent whether you are entertaining or not?"

"At home," said Rosalie, flushing.

"Ah!" said Miss Fitts, "I tell you the art of being lovely at home is the finest, hardest, highest art I know of. But I don't care what other art a woman has if she hasn't that. I don't care what women's colleges teach, if they don't teach that. I suppose they will in the end, for all light goes together, and every true ray helps every other. But meantime I'm afraid some of the graduates are missing it sometimes. I knew one, very delicate and clever, always on the start for good works. One cold morning she was half sick, and lay down on the lounge after breakfast, the most sensible thing she could do. But in the morning paper she read that a boy from an orphan home in which she was interested had been arrested for theft. Instantly she dressed and went down to the lockup to see the boy and hear his tale; then hunted up his accusers; then went and got a lawyer to defend him. She joined in a great deal of exciting talk and did not get home for hours."

"It was lovely and generous of her," said Rosalie with enthusiasm.

"Yes; but meantime she has two wilful boys at home, with minds as active as her own. The nurse was always contriving with them, or cowering before them. I coaxed one of them to sit by me that morning and make a little mat for his mamma. He thought so much of it! The very moment she came in he made a rush to give it to her. She was so nervous and tired she was almost beside herself. 'Go away,' she

said, 'and don't come near me till I call you. That made him angry — he has a nervous temperament the very reflection of her own. He began to stamp and scream. Then the poor deluded thing started in at once to discipline him for his naughtiness. O my dear, it was dreadful! and in the midst of it the father came home and had to hear and pacify it all. Next day I heard that child was wakeful all night; and its mother had a chill, and couldn't get out of bed to attend it. So the father was up a good part of the night, quieting it. A man at his place of business cannot lie down daytimes to make up lost sleep as a woman often can at home. The same kind of trouble often happened at that house — and not long after she was left a widow. They called it 'a mysterious providence' at the funeral, but I could only keep saying to myself, 'Behold the ravages of intemperance.'"

"Miss Fitts, that was terrible. And that woman *wanted* to be good!"

"It's not enough to want to be good, you must want to be good God's way. All you've got to be good with is bound up in one poor little body. You can't expect the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, to flourish out of a used-up, nervous system any more than grapes to grow on a dried-up vine."

"Do you want to discourage us from attempting anything useful or intellectual?"

"I want you to look out for the temptations that go with gifts. I wouldn't say it before them," said Miss Fitts, lowering her voice, "but I think, yes, I do think, American husbands have a pretty hard time with their gifted wives. They want all the material things so *complete* — pretty, well-kept homes, pretty

costumes for the children, carefully appointed tables, and yet they want some leisure for books and society, and have so many ambitions for outside work — all good and praiseworthy in its way; and they have such sensitive, high-strung nervous organizations — take it altogether a man has got to be pretty smart, you see, to keep up with the demand such a one will make upon him. I wouldn't say it in his hearing, but I can but think it."

"Well, what can you do about it, Miss Fitts?"

"Nothing, my dear, except that I'd like to keep saying to those wives the same old words over and over, 'Seek ye *first*, — seek ye *first* the kingdom of heaven.'"

"I don't see what that has to do with it, Miss Fitts."

"Why, my dear! every woman who prays, 'Thy kingdom come,' has got to try to make her home a corner of the kingdom of heaven, and the kingdom of heaven, you know, is *not meat and drink*, but *righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.* If one is going to diffuse those in the corner where she lives, she's got to cherish them in her own heart first, of course."

"Yes," said Rosalie.

"But, my dear, I've seen very virtuous women sacrifice them all for ideal meat and drink, as well as for German and art, and a course of concerts, and even the orphan asylum and the Sunday-school class."

Rosalie smiled. "I like your fine art," she presently said, "but I don't want you to tell me any more dreadful stories, Miss Fitts. Tell me next about people who really have been lovely at home."

II.

"You asked me to tell about people who were really lovely at home," said Miss Fitts. "But the first one I think of, Rosalie, was a very humble kind of lovely person."

"Well, tell me about her."

"If she had not been lovely at home she could not have been so at all, for she never was anywhere else. She was an aunt of mine who did the cooking and kitchen-work in our home. There were seven of us children, beside farm-hands. So she was always working, working — not in any rush or hurry, but steadily all day. But she had such sweet, quiet, wholesome ways of working that she made every kind of labor that is done about a kitchen seem beautiful to us. Wasn't that a good mission? She never shut us out of the kitchen, or said we were 'right under foot.' She gave us bits of pastry to roll out and let us help her, till we knew all the right ways of doing things before we were fairly old enough to do them. She loved fresh air, and I learned to love it just from the delightful way she had of opening the windows. She loved fresh water, and would freely draw it from the deep well, rather than let us drink what had been standing. She loved cleanliness, and I know I learned to love it when I was only a baby from her pleasant ways of coaxing me to have my hands washed. She seldom wore anything but calico, but I've seen women

in silk who could not look as ladylike. She had beautiful, smooth hair, and a gentle face. I never heard her speak a sharp word. Every morsel of food she cooked was nice. She hated waste and she hated stinginess."

"She was practical, Miss Fitts," Rosalie interrupted. "I'm afraid I can never be like her."

"But she was not lovely because she was practical. Her work was practical, but her nature was ideal. That was the reason she was lovely enough to make her work lovely. The ideal got mixed up in every pudding and every loaf of bread she made. It's a great mistake to think one can't be ideal except in such things as poetry and painting and music, or some kind of fine social entertaining. It's a mistake that's making people hate manual labor, and bringing many to ruin. No, it was the fine enthusiasm, and the love that flowed into everything she did that made her lovely. None of us could forget the way she had of teaching us little maxims that stood to her for high things: 'Try, try again,' and 'Duty before pleasure;' and then the hymns she said and sang to us! When did she find time to learn them? She was the living exposition of some of them to us:

> "'Come, Kingdom of our God,
> Sweet reign of light and love.'

"I shall never hear that without thinking of her. It was the 'sweet reign of light and love' that made her lovely; and all the time she thought herself nothing in the world."

"Tell me some more," said Rosalie.

"Well, I look out of my window Sunday afternoons, and see my neighbor, Mrs. Nicholson, reading

Sunday-school books to her children. You mightn't think her lovely, but I do. Very likely one child is on each rocker of her chair behind, one on each arm of it, one on her lap. It's a strong old chair, but of course it will get rickety. She says she wants them to feel free to get round her even if it does. She's such a *cheerful* woman. Of course she's very busy with such a family; but she says she will have Saturday afternoons to go out with her children. They make some little excursions by the street cars, or to see the picture-shops. She says she must have her share of the sunshine, and she wants to take it with them. She isn't nagging the children all the way about their behavior, or the way they've got their hats and sashes tied. They're such happy children, they're sure to behave well. Happiness makes folks pleasant mannered. I know the furniture is not very good in that house. (Wait till I get a chance, Rosalie, to tell you some time what I think about houses and furniture.) And the children are not stylish, though they are clean. They take the dresses and sacks from the older to the younger, without much toil of making over. But those boys and girls are growing up to be real capable, happy men and women. You should see how good they are to their father and mother!"

"Miss Fitts," said Rosalie, half impatiently, "why do you think so *much* about the children?"

"If you want good water haven't you got to take care of the springs?" said Miss Fitts quite sharply. "Seems to me nowadays, folks are thinking too much of the river, and the mill power, and the fishing, and the boats, and even the *scenery*, and too little of how the springs may get choked up, or dried, or trampled!"

"But can't a person be lovely at home, and have some work outside, as well?"

"*Some* can," said Miss Fitts cautiously, "but folks ought to be more careful than they are. And mothers with growing children — seems to me they need all the strength, and all the leisure, and all the mind they've got, to be sunny and shadowy enough for the plants in their own garden. 'Tisn't any by-the-way sort of business — bringing up children."

"But tell me about somebody who is lovely at home, and has outside work too."

"Well, there's Miss Drayton."

"Oh, yes," said Rosalie, "she teaches that great infant class in our mission-school, and runs half the parish work beside."

"You see, she has only her mother and grandmother at home, and both in good health. But she's lovely with them; takes off her walking-dress and makes herself pretty, if she's ever so tired, and sits down by her deaf grandmother, and tells her about everything she's done and heard, and everybody she's seen, right through the day. It's better than a play to the old lady. Miss Drayton brings out the funny side of everything to please her, and they laugh together like two children. That's something you ought to learn to do, Rosalie, if you want to be lovely at home, — to see and use the funny things."

"I never can do that," Rosalie said.

"More people can than you would think. There's something funny in every little stupid bit of life, if you turn it the right way, like sparkles in a stone. We ought to use it more."

"How?"

"Why, to make people forget their aches and their

worries and their ugly moods. Get people laughing wholesomely, and you've given the sunshine a chance. A kind of peace follows when you may say anything good, and it will be well received."

"Now you've invented a new duty. But not everybody *can* fulfil it."

"If people would only keep up in the clear sunshine and try it!" said Miss Fitts. "When you're just clean *possessed* to be lovely and helpful, Rosalie, you'll find there's help about this. I keep remembering how the Lord Jesus said He had come that we might have '*life*,' and have it 'more abundantly.' I believe that means so abundantly that folks can even be funny out of the abundance of it. I don't think it's irreverent to believe that the Lord puts it into people's hearts to be full of fun sometimes when you see what good ends it will serve."

"O Miss Fitts!"

"I don't. Just see how a little humor will delight the children and do them good. You can do anything with them after it, and how it pleases the old and makes the sick forget their pains! When you've got people in good humor there's a chance for all that's good to reach them."

"I never thought of fun in that way," said Rosalie.

"Why, it just means a light, happy spirit. It ought to belong to every Christian. Folks used to think it was inconsistent for a professor of religion to have it. Seems to me the inconsistency is for him not to have it. And that reminds me of another lovely woman — lovely at home and everywhere."

"Who was she?"

"A minister's wife; the blessedest woman that ever stepped. It seemed as if she could not open her

mouth but the fun must flow out; and she didn't need to speak it, for it was always shining in her eyes. But half the secret of it was that she had the kindest, most sensitive heart. She couldn't bear that anybody should have pain; she wanted to ease it all, and bring pleasure instead. Her husband was a grave, good man, not — well — not *winning* as she was. He kept his place in his parish for forty years, and I believe it was her sweet temper and mother wit that time and again diverted discontent and smoothed over difficulties, and kept him freshened up for his work, so that he was kept in his place and blessed in it. Didn't he love her! and his people loved her, too. But then they lived in the country."

"What difference does that make?"

"Oh, folks may have time to laugh in the country, they don't get so *engaged*. I see how it is here, people have no *time* to be entertaining at home. Then such a procession of engagements; so many clubs and societies and associations to be looked after, it makes people tired and silent and grave when they get to their homes. Something is lost in the way of smiles and good times and affectionate, happy ways, that the Lord loves to see in homes, seems to me. I was told once, there's no such word as home in the French language. Sometimes I think we're going to lose the thing itself here in America."

"Why, Miss Fitts?"

"Oh, I see little signs that trouble me. I read a story in my *Century* that told about some nice, aristocratic Boston folks. They were good, kind people, but when the father couldn't use his eyes, the story shows how he never thinks of asking his daughters to read to him, they have so many social and charitable

engagements. The way is for him to hire a reader. That made me feel bad. What could make up for all that might be between a father and daughter growing intimate over books? To pay the price of such a great, beautiful pleasure for any good one might do to outsiders, seems to me too much. I can't think it's right such ways should be customary. We might as well live in a community like the Shakers. If mutual help in homes is to be given up, seems to me the very seed of true heart life will perish out of the land. If nurses and governesses step in between mothers and children, what is going to make it up in the way of heart development to either side?"

There was such a frown of disturbance upon Miss Fitts's face that Rosalie was alarmed.

"Miss Fitts," she said, "never mind that. What was it you were going to tell me about houses and furniture in connection with being lovely at home?"

III.

"I WANTED to say this about houses and furniture in connection with being lovely at home," said Miss Fitts, "that the way women are going to work to make home lovely in these days often seems just opposed to their being lovely in it. They get together a lot of pretty china things, and little plush tables, and soft, yellow curtains, and fancy work, and pretty pictures, and footstools, and cabinets with mirrors in; and then they are in earnest to arrange them just the prettiest way they can. And I do say it's a wonder to see how they can make their houses look like pictures as they do. Sometimes the rooms get sort of smothered up and cluttered with curtains and furniture, so that you can't seem to breathe freely. That's the only thing that isn't pretty about the new ways of fixing homes. But what does it matter about the feathers in the nest, if the mother bird has got so lean and sharp and peevish getting them together and laying them straight that she can hardly help pecking everybody that comes near her, and not a chick can stir for fear of disturbing something and getting a reprimand?"

"But, Miss Fitts," said Rosalie, "I think it makes people pleasanter to see things look pretty and bright about them."

"So it does, if there isn't too great a burden of care and expense with it all. But when a young wife

has a perpetual discontent in her mind for want of a set of curtains here, or a picture there, and either scrimps her husband's dinner to get it, or induces him to stretch his means beyond what is prudent, something uglier than eyes ever beheld has got into that home. Or, say, having got her house full of pretty things, she sees she must either have more help than she can afford, to keep them in order, or must make herself a bond slave to dusting and care. Oh! in a pretty house I've seen a pretty face all seamed and distorted with cross lines just about pretty things. To be made unhappy by your privileges — isn't that a misfortune? To be made unlovely just for the sake of having lovely things about you! I tell you, Rosalie, in spite of all that's said in praise of pretty surroundings, nowadays, I'm more than ever a heretic about them. I come near hating them sometimes, because I see them interfere with inner, that is, real loveliness. Now you're staring at me, and more than half angry with me. But let me try to explain:

"It's dreadful to live in *things*. The more things you have, the more you've got to think about them, the more you *must* live in them. The prettier they are, the more you like to live in them. Then don't you see how a woman gets belittled? First she wants to get things; then to fix them; then to show them. She grows more and more like a child with a baby-house. You go to see her and she begins to show you this and that, and you are interested and admire everything. But, after all, you didn't go to her house as you would to a museum or an art-shop. You want to see *her*. You want to sit down and have a little talk with her. You ask about the children. I knew

the time when it was like the letting out of water to ask a mother that. To tell about their growth, their studies, their talk and their tempers, would set a mother glowing and smiling and talking by the hour. It makes me sadder than I can tell to see how the times have changed about that. I've seen well-meaning mothers, lately, plenty of them, who, if you asked about the children, had very little answer to make, and that was mostly not about the children but about their nurse, to tell how good or how bad she was, how lifeless or how entertaining; or else the talk would run off on to the best place in New York to buy children's clothes. A woman who has been living in *things* is too blinded to know much that is real about her children.

"It is the same with her about matters relating to our country, or the world, questions of politics, or education, or missionary effort. She has been shutting herself out from them. Well, I know there's excuse to be made. The business of running a household *is* absorbing, even for the wisest. But that's just why it should be made simple, so that one may not get shut up in it as in a prison, where the air is close, and where you can't find a hole as big as a teacup looking out toward eternity. What difference does it make if a woman's prison is made of stone, or of all manner of pretty toys, so long as it just keeps her *in?*"

"But I think it *would* make quite a difference, Miss Fitts," said Rosalie, smiling.

"Then it's a difference that's against her. She loves the prison and builds the walls higher all the time. That's another thing; there's no end to the craze for pretty things. The reason is, the pleasure

they give is short-lived, and if you're shut up to that kind of pleasure you're in perpetual wanting. When I see such a woman buying and buying, I remember all the little orphans and Indians and immigrant children growing up all over our country, and needing kindergartens and industrial schools and Sunday-schools, and it makes me half wild to see her wasting herself and her money so."

"Ah, Miss Fitts," said Rosalie, "*that's* the secret of your spite against the pretty things."

"No, Rosalie, not wholly, it's only one of the reasons why I keep seeing, even in lovely pictures, and innocent wall-papers and curtain-stuffs, a kind of pretty devil's bait to trap the unwary."

"I love them all, Miss Fitts, and I don't like to have you call them such names. Don't you remember how John Wesley said he wasn't going to let the devil have all the pretty tunes? and why should he have the pretty things either?"

"See to it he doesn't, my dear. There's where your safety lies. Make them God's tools if you don't want them to corrupt you; things to serve the kingdom of heaven with. Then pretty soon you'll find out their true place, and that it's a small one in comparison to that of some other things. To make yourself and your home lovely, you'll want, oh, so much finer and more costly things; and yet, things to be bought without money and without price; things safe to covet; to hunger and thirst for; a happy, free spirit; a mind alive and seeing open windows to show your country's welfare, and nature, and the world and heaven. You'll want room for things not just your own, but things mutual between you and all men, common joys and common pains, and common

praises and hopes. See here, my dear," she cried, suddenly interrupting herself, "do you want to know what test I find myself applying to some of these little pictures of homes, full of lovely things and all complete and neat as a jewel-box; ruffled pillows, shams on the beds, tidies on the chairs, pictures, portières, rugs, little fireplaces with bright andirons and embroidered lambrequins, jars of flowers in the windows? Well, I look about and ask, 'Is any great man likely to grow up in this home?'

"You needn't laugh, Rosalie. I know it isn't impossible, but isn't the idea a little incongruous? Where there has to be so much thought spent on pretty things; where little children are being taught to set great value on them, and to make them practically an end instead of a means in living, does it seem likely that great souls, great hearts and minds are likely to grow? Ah, I think if you *can* satisfy a soul with its little material surroundings you've done it an awful injury! You've shut the door upon imagination, and stunted bravery and faith. You've clipped the wings of effort and deadened the mind against all the larger interests of mankind. No, great men do not come that way. I think of Lincoln ciphering on the wooden shovel by the firelight in his log cabin; I think of the Emersons washing dishes for their mother in their plain home; I think of the Beechers racketing round that old parsonage in Litchfield; and of Whittier looking out the farmhouse window to see palaces in the snow. And I think about those cottages Carlyle and Burns grew up in; I think of Luther singing for his bread; and I think about John Ruskin without a toy of his own in that simple, dignified home his mother made for him. He

says he studied art from the patterns of the counterpanes and the carpets. He'd learn better art off from any counterpane, I take it, than from most of the placques our women hang up. Well, and I think of Macaulay, one of ten — every mother can tell what that means in a home. No, not every mother in these days can tell what joys and riches, as well as what labor and simple living, the raising of ten children means in an ordinary home. Did you ever notice how many great men have come out of large families? Just notice after this and see. 'Where brothers dwell, and sisters meet' a child gets a start no other planting-place will give him, and it often lasts to keep him ahead of his fellows all his life long. But I did not mean to get upon that. I started to say this, Rosalie: There's got to be a new thought about homes. It's this: What sort of a home is best for a great soul to be developed in?"

IV.

"Now, Miss Fitts, do not talk any more about great questions," said Rosalie, "but be downright practical and tell me how *I* can be lovely at home."

"You know more about it this minute," said Miss Fitts, giving her a shrewd, affectionate glance, "than a dull old woman like" —

"But I want to know what you know, or what you think."

"Well, if I were young, and could be pretty, as all young girls can, more or less, I'd be sure to be pretty at home."

"Now you're counselling vanity."

"Not a bit of it. Vanity is all in the motive. Nothing of us belongs so wholly to other people as our looks, and those who have to see us most, if they don't deserve the best we can give them in that line, who does?"

Rosalie laughed. "I never thought of that," she said.

"Few girls do," said Miss Fitts, "their best efforts to look well are always when they go out. It's very foolish."

"Why, Miss Fitts?"

"Because nobody cares about your looks as your home people do. When you wear this pretty pink evening dress, a number of people will give you a careless glance, and say you are looking well; the

hostess will be pleased to think you are an ornament to her party; some of your own friends will have a little honest pleasure in your appearance; but the real sweet, steady satisfaction it gives will be in the hearts of your father and mother.

"Or," continued Miss Fitts, "if anybody should admire the rose so much that he wishes to transplant it, be sure he would not wish to do so if he thought it was going to drop its dews, and turn yellow and brown in the leaf when he had got it in his own garden. Do you know, I think the prettier a woman is personally, the more you hate her deformities when she consents to go about in crimping-pins and a slatternly Mother Hubbard. I despise a woman who will go about so among her children."

"Hush, Miss Fitts; you are not going back to the children just now, you know."

"But I must stand up for them. They like pretty looks, and are insulted by a slovenly appearance as much as anybody, though they don't know how to express their feeling."

"But people are used to us at home. They've got to take us as we are anyway; and one must be free and easy somewhere."

"Free and easy, yes. You ought never to wear a dress you're not free in. I'm losing custom right along these tight-fitting days by sticking to that principle. But nobody ought to be free and easy in being untidy."

"Oh, of course a lady expects to look tolerably neat always. But one gets hurried in the morning, or comes in to dinner late and tired, and can't take pains to look her best. Strangers only judge us by our looks, so when we go in company we must try to look well."

"See here," said Miss Fitts, "if you are in the habit of looking pretty at home, then won't you be most likely to be *always* pretty? It's like manners a little. You won't be caught off guard in what you practise every day. One of these days," she continued meditatively, "there's going to be a new civilization. It will begin from within, outward. Folks will try to look like angels just for the Lord's sake, and then for the sake of their little ones, and their nearest and dearest. It will be the same about their housekeeping. There will be no fixing up for company then. There won't be any need. Things will always be at their best; but dress and housekeeping and hospitality will be far, far simpler than they are, — very clean and simple, but very beautiful and perfect."

"O Miss Fitts," cried Rosalie, "come back from dreaming about the millennium."

"There's that expression 'free and easy' you used just now, Rosalie," continued Miss Fitts. "It reminded me of a sermon I read once of Phillips Brooks about the 'law of liberty.' He said in it, if I got his meaning right, that the judgment-seat might be nothing but the lifting off of every restraint, so that people just turned and went as they pleased. That showed what they were, that read them out plain, — their own choice. See now how the law of liberty is a perfect judgment; it probes right down into the depths of every heart. Well, now, home is the free and easy place, as you say, and so far home's the judgment-seat. Just what's free and easy for you, that's what you are. If you like to be slack or slangy, or fretful or fidgety, or lazy or selfish, you can be so at home. There's little restraint. The

perfect law of liberty is upon you at home, judging you all the time."

"Oh, have mercy, Miss Fitts!" cried Rosalie, covering her face with her hands. "Have mercy! you do make things so deep and awful."

"I don't make them. They are as they are. Now don't you forget that law of liberty at home. I know your choice is for everything good. You've got to live up to your choices at home if you are going to be real true to them."

"But come back to details, Miss Fitts. I'm frightened at your great laws."

"Well, of course you want to practise your best manners at home."

"To the children, of course," said Rosalie.

"Yes; nobody will appreciate them more, or give them back quicker in sweeter ways. I've seen people try to teach children manners in about as sensible a way as if you tried to make a green apple rosy by painting it over. They never think of shining on them, not to speak of giving them time and sap. As likely as not they will insinuate a worm of hypocrisy into the child's heart, and get their pretty color that way. They won't seem to appreciate the mischief at all.

"I believe," continued she, "more family quarrels have been made by folks not using gracious manners toward their relatives than in any other way. And I have known girls so sweet and smiling in society you would not believe they could be ugly, who thought nothing of speaking rudely to their fathers and mothers at home. You are not one of those, Rosalie, but sometimes you like to sit mum over your embroidery, or to hug your book when your brother is want-

ing to have you talk with him; and you don't always run to wait on your mother as you should."

"Oh, Miss Fitts, if only you had not crushed me with that dreadful law of liberty!"

"And," continued Miss Fitts, "I've seen ladies who wouldn't for anything talk about their servants in company, who begin to fret to their husbands about Bridget or Ann, the moment those poor men get into the house. Women get so *sunk* in their work. It's a dreadful state, — as far as possible from being lovely. I wish often they could have a brisk walk in the open air before they come to their meals, as their husbands do. They might come to table merrier and sweeter. But of course that can't always be. They ought to make it a principle to behave as beautifully to their own folks as they would to company."

V.

"Well, now that you have told me to look pretty and to be mannerly at home, what else, Miss Fitts? Those are only outside things, you know."

"I don't know," said Miss Fitts. "Most outside things begin from within. But there's something harder than these. I wonder if I can explain it. Did you ever see a girl get a poetry book, and sit delighted over it because the words were so beautiful and the thoughts so high, but lay it down when any of the family came into the sitting-room, and begin to talk about what was in the newspaper, or some bit of gossip, or about things to eat or wear, and never say a word about the pleasure she'd had in that lovely poetry?"

"Yes," said Rosalie, blushing.

"Did you ever go to see a friend who was going to be married, and have your heart moved by seeing her happy, noble feeling about it, and then come home and tell your mother little commonplace things about the bride's trousseau and wedding presents, and never say a word about the pleasure you had in her happiness?"

"Yes."

"And did you ever go to a funeral, and get all sorts of holy, solemn thoughts, and then come home and tell about the folks who were there, and the inscription on the coffin-plate, and the way the flowers were

fixed, and never say one word about the true helpful feelings that came to you ?"

"Yes, often."

"How was it when you became a Christian ?"

"I thought I *never* could tell my mother."

"And now, when you hear anything at church you wish your brothers could feel and love as you do, do you just eagerly go and try to show it to them as you see it ?"

"O Miss Fitts ! I know I'm very wicked. My heart just aches about such things sometimes. But I don't know how to begin to talk about such things at home."

"It's all wrong," said Miss Fitts sorrowfully. "I see it everywhere, and I don't know what to make of it. Why, up in heaven, Rosalie, our Lord is going to say, 'Enter ye into my joy.' If we do truly want to make our homes a little heaven here below, *we've* got to share our joy too. All the great, holy, best thoughts and feelings you have, they are your joy; they make life worth having, don't they ?"

"Yes."

"And if they do it for you, they can for others. Just think of one getting in the way at home, of all places, of talking out our worst, or at least our cheapest, worldly, commonplace side, just the part of us that has to do with things to eat or to wear, and never having a word to say of our truest, highest, spiritual life. What does it say in the Scripture about 'not hiding thyself from thine own flesh' ? It is talking about charity, I believe, but is there any better than to share the very fine gold of life ?"

"How can I do it, Miss Fitts ?"

"By just setting out to do it on principle. Ask

the Lord to help you, and throw away your fears and your pride. Be just frank and simple and generous about it. You've got plenty of tact and contrivance about you, Rosalie; just use it in this service, and see if you don't get repaid."

"But one is so afraid of seeming a hypocrite!"

"When you know you're in dead earnest? You can trust wisdom to justify herself better than that."

"But people are often so dreadfully silent when you say something unusual."

"They may receive it all the same. And if you keep on in the same strain just as if it was usual, they may begin to feel it so, and you may get free answers after a while. Then won't you be happy!"

Rosalie took a little book from her shelves and began to turn the leaves. "You will like this," she said. "Now listen:

> "'Say, what delights can equal those
> That stir the spirit's inner deeps,
> When one who loves, but knows not, reaps
> A truth from one who loves and knows?'"

"That's it!" cried Miss Fitts, delighted. "There's a love of truths in every heart. Why don't we trust it more? Why don't we talk so as to call it out? We expect the very atmosphere's going to do it in heaven — why don't we try to make such an atmosphere in homes? It makes folks so happy to be feeling and thinking their best. If you can help them to do it, Rosalie, you'll be the highest kind of an artist."

"Some day," she continued, "you'll begin to make a home of your own. I often think if I was going to do that I'd never let this speechless way get into it

— never from the beginning. Who should share the loveliest, deepest things in each other's hearts if husbands and wives should not? — and what else should they most freely give to their children? There's a hard-working mother I know who hasn't much time to talk to her children, but she's got one of these 'Golden-Text' calendars, with good, wise sayings on it, beside the verses, and every morning she calls them round it to read the verses and texts, and to talk about them. They all like it. She won't let her lips get sealed to them, or theirs toward her, and when the Holy Spirit comes into those children's hearts he'll find open doors of utterance their mother has kept for them. Isn't that a great thing to do?"

"But what if people don't want you to speak your best?"

"Do your duty bravely all the same. You may get thanked for it sooner than you think. If bread is bread, folks must come to hunger for it some time. Then they'll maybe look for the crumbs you let fall."

Rosalie was silent for a while. Presently she said:

"Before one could even begin such work one must be very lovely at home, and very loving too."

"Very loving," repeated Miss Fitts. "I guess that's the secret, Rosalie, of the whole art. At any rate it has no foundation without that."

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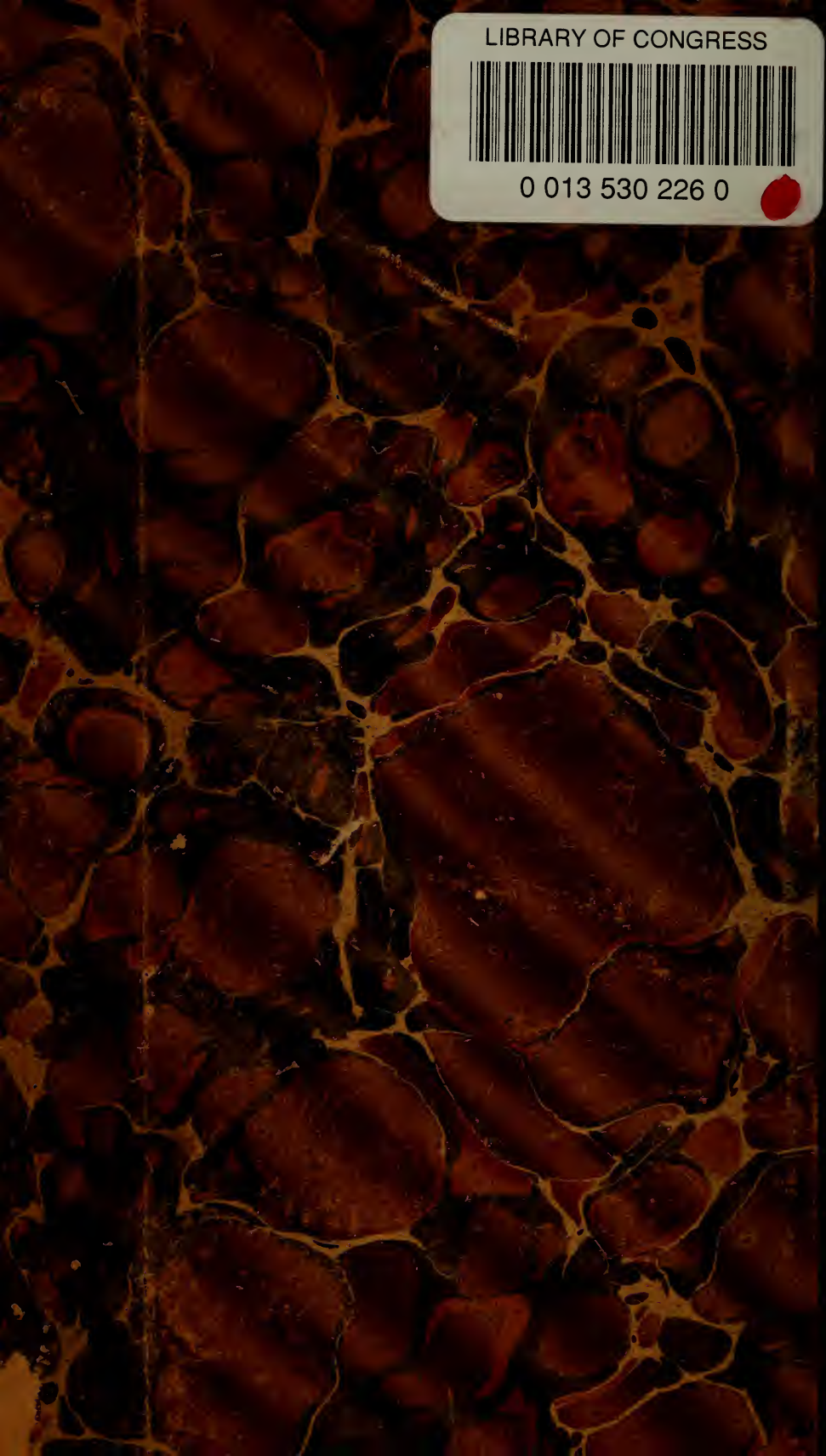
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